

The Vermont congressional delegation has called on the Army and National Guard to continue funding an essential outreach program for Vermont veterans returning from deployments in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

The Vermont Guard's first-of-its-kind outreach program was funded since 2006 by federal grants secured by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. With a 2010 grant of \$2.4 million about to run out, a congressional budget logjam threatens continued funding for the important program.

The Army and National Guard may continue funding this program if Pentagon leaders direct them to do so.

Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) asked Army Secretary John M. McHugh and Gen. Craig McKinley, chief of the National Guard Bureau, to designate funds to continue the program's operation this year and to develop a plan to continue the program in the future.

Their letter said, "These programs ensure Guard families have access to information regarding physical and behavioral health care, substance abuse treatment and prevention, and marriage and financial counseling services which make a difference for Guard member's successful reintegration following deployment."

The Vermont program has been used as a model by other states that have begun similar outreach programs. The Vermont delegation spearheaded a bipartisan campaign to gain the support of the congressional delegations of several states that have similar programs. Forty offices in the Senate and House have signed onto the effort.

A front-page article last year in the Stars and Stripes featured the Vermont program and said military leaders predicted it would become a model for the nation.